

Tracking your budget

Superintendents discover that software is a powerful tool in monitoring and managing not only their programs, but their costs.

By RON HALL/ Managing Editor

While today's superintendents must be sharp when it comes to agronomics, it's equally vital that they understand golf course budgeting too. They're increasingly required to track and manage maintenance expenses. This is a daunting task with maintenance budgets, on many courses, exceeding seven figures.

A relatively recent tool to help them manage their programs, and especially to blend their maintenance programs with their costs, is industry-specific software. More superintendents are embracing this technology in an effort to give them more control over organizing, monitoring and managing their programs. It gives them up-to-the-minute snapshots of their programs (and costs), and more complete information of specific aspects of their programs at the touch of a "mouse" should they need that too.

One big reason why many turf managers are just now beginning to embrace golf course maintenance software, which has been available in one form or another for about a decade, is its increasing ease of use.

Software developers know that if the learning curve for their products are too steep, busy professionals—and that certainly includes superintendents—won't use them. These suppliers are responding with products that don't require a lot of computer expertise by end users. Suppliers are also increasing technical support for their software products. Both are resulting from user feedback. Turf managers are becoming increasingly vocal concern-

ing the improvements that they want to see in their software products.

Gene Dommer, CGCS, is probably like a lot of other superintendents who don't exactly look forward to preparing the annual golf course maintenance

budget. Dommer says the process used to take several weeks of pencil-and-paper calculations. But budgeting, he says, is easier now because of computerization.

"When I did this year's budget I just entered my figures into the computer, putting in the percent in increase of costs for everything, including labor. Then I compared it with last year's budget and for the last five years, and it was basically done," says Dommer, superintendent at Peach Tree Golf &

Stock Number	Description	Subgroup	Last Orig	Meas	Units
E003410	Reelmaster 216 - 2'W/1 D1	Mowers,Reel,Ride		395	Hr
E003630	Reelmaster 5300 D	Mowers,Reel,Ride		1,315	Hr
E007174	66" Ride-O-Vac Sweeper	Sweepers		3,015	Hr
E007215-1	Workman 4300 D	Vehicles		2,780	Hr
E007215-2	Workman 4300 D	Vehicles		162	Hr
E008880	Sand Pro 14 HP	Bunkers,Rakes		1,466	Hr
E009110	Greens Aerator	Aerators,Walk		94	Hr
E009501	Fairway Aerator	Aerators,Towed		167	Hr
E030224	Groundmaster 224	Mowers,Rotary,Ride		999	Hr
E030590	Groundmaster 580-D	Mowers,Rotary,Ride		95	Hr
E041105-1	Multi Pro 1100	Vehicles		3,750	Hr
E041105-2	Multi Pro 1100	Vehicles		139	Hr
E041120	Sprayer Tank MultiPro 1000	Sprayer		395	Hr
E041150	PA-17 Spreader MultiPro 1000	Spreader		712	Hr
E041190	Injector Sprayer MultiPro 1000	Sprayer		2,230	Hr
E041420-1	Topdresser 5000	Topdresser		4,165	Hr
E041420-2	Topdresser 5000	Topdresser		0	Hr
E041550	PA-21 Spreader MultiPro 5000	Spreader		306	Hr
E044020	Turf Sweeper 5400 HL	Sweepers		4,369	Hr

Stock Number	Inventory Group	Description
FT00030	Fertilizer	04-0-22 Green
FT00021	Fertilizer	26-4-8 Rough
FT00022	Fertilizer	10-19-22 Green
FT00023	Fertilizer	16-0-24 Green
FT00024	Fertilizer	18-3-19 Green
FT00025	Fertilizer	10-19-22 Fairway
FT00026	Fertilizer	Aerators,Tow/1 Fairway
FT00027	Fertilizer	19-2-19 Green
FT00028	Fertilizer	15-30-12 Starter
GC00010	Golf Course Supplies	Specialty A Cup 4"
GC00011	Golf Course Supplies	Specialty A Cup 6"
GC00010	Golf Course Supplies	Flag - Regular
GC00011	Golf Course Supplies	Flag - Tournament
IR00010	Intigation	Repair Coupling 3"
IR00011	Intigation	Repair Coupling 4"
IR00012	Intigation	Repair Coupling 6"

Group	Category	Jan 96	Feb 96	Mar 96	Apr 96	May 96
Chemical/Fertilizer	Chemicals	6000	4500	1500	2750	4750
Chemical/Fertilizer	Fertilizers	6000	5250	3000	2000	3600
Computer	Computer Purchase	6500	0	0	0	0
Computer	Computer Supplies	25	25	25	25	25
Computer	Consulting Computer	500	0	0	0	0
Employee Misc	Employee Meals	575	536	497	527	497
Employee Misc	Employee Training	300	200	200	300	1200
Employee Misc	Employee Uniforms	130	130	130	130	130
Employee Payroll	Payroll Hourly	6156	21382	15434	15020	15190
Employee Payroll	Payroll Insurance	662	269	706	509	496
Employee Payroll	Payroll Salary	5000	5000	5000	5000	5000
Employee Payroll	Payroll Taxes	730	1914	1381	1344	1351
Equip Maint/Repair	Equip Maintenance	3000	3000	2500	2000	2000
Equip Maint/Repair	Equip Repair	3000	3000	2500	2000	2000
Equip Purchase	Equip Purch Heavy	40000	0	0	0	0
Equip Purchase	Equip Purch Light	20000	0	0	0	0

Suppliers are responding with products that don't require a lot of computer expertise by end users.

More about GCS

GCS for Windows covers every aspect of turf site operations and can be installed and operated with absolutely no computer experience. The program can also be used by parks and recreation managers or stadium managers.

All functions are described by InCircuit as "extremely intuitive." All functions are accessible by a simple 'point and click' of the mouse. The system integrates several management functions, including chemical/fertilizer applications and record keeping, budgeting and forecasting, equipment maintenance, inventory control, work orders, personnel records and much more. Help buttons appear on every screen to guide you through each operation.

GCS takes full advantage of Windows advanced graphics and easy-to-use qualities. You can scan in photos of employees, inventory, equipment and your turf site.

Printed reports are professionally formatted and customized with your company logo. The system also interfaces with a fax modem so purchase orders, reports and other forms can be faxed directly from the application. File utilities allow you to share information with common applications such as MS-Excel, Lotus, Quicken and virtually any other business software.

Standard package lists at \$1995. The Network Node version sells for \$395. Support plans are also available for \$495 or \$295.

For information about GCS 3.10 for Windows, contact InCircuit Development Corporation, 515 Capital of Texas Hwy., Suite 225, Austin, TX 78746. (800) 963-1925. Visit their web site at www.incircuit.com. The site lists components and system requirements and pricing information.

TM



Country Club,
Marysville, CA.

"We track the budget every day," he adds, "and I put together a weekly report. I can tell to the dime how much I've spent on things like electricity, labor, fertilizer or any of the departments."

Dommer says the software that he uses is GCS 3.10 for Windows. (GCS stands for Grounds Care System.) Basically, he says, the software allows him to manage just about every aspect of his course's maintenance with a lot less paperwork and guesswork. "It's like having a private secretary," he says.

This particular program is divided into sections,

called modules: Chemical, Equipment, Financial, Grounds, Inventory, Personnel, Weather, Work Order. All are fully integrated.

Jim Wier is the chief mechanic at Iron Horse Golf Course, Ft. Worth, TX. He uses the GCS 3.10 for Windows program to track "all of my maintenance on all of my equipment."

Wier must keep 53 pieces of maintenance equipment in top running order at the 18-hole, high-end municipal course. He said the first step in converting to the program was to enter information about the equipment into the program.

"Setting up the program took about four or five fairly intensive days," says Wier. "I'm not in a position where I can just sit here and enter data for four or five hours at a time. I'm constantly being called out of the office."

With some technical support from the supplier, Wier says computerization has greatly simplified the tracking of his preventive maintenance program. "We set up service intervals for each piece of equipment, and the program will tell you what maintenance is required for each piece of equipment.."

But is computerization for your course? That, of course, depends upon several factors, not the least of which are

expense, and also the ability and willingness of the users of the software program to input the necessary data, and then update it as needed.

A small, low-budget course may be able to manage its maintenance programs by hand with a traditional ledger.

Larger courses with more tasks, people and equipment to manage might find that the initial cost and time needed to get the computerized system up and running is a small price to pay for increased control and efficiency. □